



## AFTER SARAH EVERARD MURDER

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# Socialist Worker

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## AS ANGRY PROTESTS ERUPT

# SMASH SEXIST SYSTEM



## DEFY THE TORIES AND STAY ON THE STREETS

### STRIKES

**NHS workers can walk out—and they can win**

TALK OF industrial action is echoing round the NHS following the Tories' 1 percent pay insult.

Past national strikes show it's possible to fight back.

Some strikes not only won over pay but also improved patient care. But union leaders will try and do deals that sell workers short.

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### STAND UP TO RACISM



**Join 20 March day of action against racism**

ANTI-RACISTS worldwide planned to mobilise in street protests and online rallies this Saturday.

The day of action comes as the right to protest is under attack.

Events will challenge racism, Islamophobia, antisemitism and attacks on refugees.

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### COUP

**Strikes confront military attacks across Myanmar**

MYANMAR'S murderous military regime imposed martial law in parts of the country on Monday.

The army and police have unleashed the worst violence yet against the opposition movement. But trade unions' call for strikes shows hope.

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## THE THINGS THEY SAY

**‘We must not allow the tragic murder of a young woman turn into attacks on men and attacks on the police.’**

Newly retired right winger **Nigel Farage** plunges back into politics to defend the police

**‘Protect Churchill at all costs’**

A senior police officer rallies round a racist’s statue during Sunday’s London demonstrations

**‘I don’t think anybody should be sitting back in an armchair saying what they would do differently’**

Metropolitan police commissioner **Cressida Dick** thinks police violence is a difficult job

**‘We must make every part of the criminal justice system work to protect and defend women and girls’**

Sexist prime minister **Boris Johnson** will try his best to make a sexist system better

**‘No, we’ve had enough tonight with the rioters’**

Response of a cop to a woman who had a man flash her after leaving Saturday’s vigil in Clapham



# DEFIANT PROTESTS DEMAND JUSTICE

Thousands took to the streets to call for change after the death of Sarah Everard, Socialist Worker reports

**A FURIOUS crowd confronted the cops in Clapham Common, south London, on Saturday evening.**

Protesters defied a ban to gather and pay their respects to Sarah Everard—and to demand an end to violence against women.

It was a fantastic show of resistance to women’s oppression, and a defence of the right to protest.

The rage has exploded against a sexist system and the police who protect it. A police officer is accused of murdering Sarah Everard—yet police brutalised women when they came out against what had happened.

Even Labour leader Keir Starmer and Lib Dem leader Ed Davey have been forced to condemn the cops’ behaviour. That’s not because they stand with the protesters. It’s because they sense the rage in society.

Sarah Everard vanished after walking through Clapham Common over a week ago.

A cop from an elite unit is suspected to have murdered her.

Protesters on Saturday chanted, “Shame on you,” “Murderers,” “Who do you protect?” and, “Police go home,” at the cops. Many had come to remember Sarah, and light candles.

Yet the cops arrested several women and forcibly removed others from the common’s bandstand.

Protester Janet told Socialist Worker, “I’m fucking fuming. I came to pay my respects to that young woman, I laid flowers and I got punched by a police officer.

“They say they’re here to keep us safe—I don’t feel safe.”

Sam was one of many men who joined the protest. “People have just totally lost trust in the police. They are supposed to be there to protect and serve. But they’re killing civilians like us,” he told Socialist Worker.

There was fury every time the cops arrested a protester, often aggressively pushing others out of the way. “This is a peaceful protest,” said Sam. “But they’re provoking the crowd.”

A court last Friday refused to set aside a police ban on the protest. Yet an estimated 5,000 people showed up in Clapham anyway.

“I don’t think they expected this many people to show up,” protester Abi told Socialist Worker. “But they couldn’t have stopped it.”

And Hannah questioned how the cops were treating protesters. “Why do they need this many police



PROTESTERS GATHER at Clapham Common before the police attack

officers?” she asked. “Aren’t they supposed to be fighting crime?”

Handmade placards reflected anger at the system’s failure to protect women. One addressed to Sarah Everard said that a “society of hypocrites” had “let you down”. Another read, “Sweep state violence off our streets.”

Cops walked around the crowd explaining to people that they could face fines if they remained. Their

threats encouraged many to leave—but lots remained on the common.

There were chants of, “The sisters, united, will never be defeated.” Yet it isn’t only women who are standing up against oppression and violence. And the fury is fuelling a more general discontent.

“People are really angry,” said Sam. “I think the system could just collapse completely.”

**Sadie Robinson**

## The establishment quakes following police violence

THE SCENES of police attacking protesters in Clapham sent the establishment into a mini meltdown. Cops pinned women to the ground and dragged them to police vans. Fear that this would spark widespread outrage forced even top Tories to raise “concerns”.

Boris Johnson said he was “deeply concerned”. And home secretary Priti Patel has announced an independent review into police

behaviour. She reportedly “feels there are still questions to be answered” by the cops.

Labour leader Keir Starmer said what happened in Clapham was “deeply disturbing”.

“Women came together to mourn Sarah Everard,” he said. “They should have been able to do so peacefully. I share their anger and upset at how this has been handled.” London Labour mayor Sadiq

Khan said the police behaviour was “completely unacceptable”. He wants a “full independent investigation”.

And Lib Dem leader Ed Davey called for Met police commissioner Cressida Dick to resign.

It’s good that anger from below is pushing politicians to talk tough.

But their ultimate aim is to protect the police and limit the fallout.

So Patel’s review is “in the interest of confidence in policing”.

And Khan said, “There isn’t adequate trust and confidence from women and girls in the police and criminal justice system. Further steps must be taken to address this.” Some trade unions published statements condemning the violence.

All unions should be defending the right to protest.

## Australia’s resistance

**HUGE PROTESTS have erupted across Australia against sexual abuse and harassment.**

They follow multiple allegations of sexual assault centred around the country’s parliament.

Tens of thousands of people joined the March 4 Justice events on Monday that took place in the cities of Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne.

Organisers said it could be the “biggest uprising of women” that Australia has seen.

Ex-political adviser Brittany Higgins, who said she was raped in a minister’s office, told protesters, “There is a horrible acceptance of sexual violence in Australia.” Prime minister Scott Morrison had refused to meet protesters.

Protester Jade said, “The message from the government is that women’s voices don’t matter.”

## ‘Protest against women’s oppression’

**RAGE RETURNED to the streets on Sunday as around 4,000 people protested in central London after police broke up the vigil on Clapham Common the previous night.**

Protester Heidi told Socialist Worker, “Violence against women comes from the top of the system and the violence of the police and the state are felt in every part of our society.

“People talk about women having a ‘right to safety’. But part of my right to safety should be my right to protest and oppose the system without the threat of being brutalised by the police.”

Outside the Met’s headquarters New Scotland Yard, demonstrators booed cops who dared walk through the crowds.

When one officer told a demonstrator that protests are banned people angrily replied, “We don’t need your permission.”

Protesters chanted, “Sisters, united, will never be defeated,” and, “Whose streets—our streets.” They marched towards Parliament Square, then joined another protest in Trafalgar Square.

Zumi told Socialist Worker



Gathering to protest at London Fields in Hackney, east London

## Defying bans across Britain

**ACROSS BRITAIN thousands defied police bans on Saturday to show their grief and rage.**

Over 400 protesters gathered on London Fields in Hackney, east London, and chanted, “No justice, no peace—fuck the police.”

Tania, one of those attending, told Socialist Worker, “I am so angry about what happened to Sarah Everard and about the way women are treated. “I wasn’t going to sit at home, I had to come out and it is inspiring to see hundreds have done the same.”

Over 400 people gathered in Priory Park, north London and 150 turned out in Walthamstow, east London.

Around 200 assembled in Brighton where there were several arrests. Over 90 people gathered on the Wanstead Flats in Newham, east London.

Alice told Socialist Worker, “I was speaking to my mum.

And she described the same kinds of experiences of sexual harassment 40 years ago that I do now.

“Nothing seems to have changed and it makes me so angry.”

The police tried to intimidate anyone who attended a vigil in York. But as people were dispersed more joined and numbers swelled to over 60.

Meanwhile, over 200 people gathered in Nottingham and 100 in Birmingham.

In Manchester people laid flowers by the Emmeline Pankhurst memorial. Forty people attended a vigil in Lancaster. In Cambridge, over 150 people marched.

Over 60 marched on the police station in Swansea, west Wales, and dozens gathered in Cardiff.



Protesters in Parliament Square

PICTURE: GUY SMALLMAN

that while she was shocked by the police actions at Clapham Common she wasn’t surprised. “As someone who is black and a woman it is clear to me that the police will never be our friends,” she said.

“Their whole institution is built on violence to keep us in our place.

“I take Covid-19 seriously, we

all should. But do you know what is also important?

“My safety on the streets. Coronavirus has meant that more women have faced domestic violence.

“We need to continue to protest against women’s oppression and we need to do it now.”

**Sophie Squire**

## Fury on the streets for a third night

**OVER 1,000 angry protesters raged through the streets of central London on Monday on the third night of protest against the sexist system.**

Demonstrators gathered in Parliament Square for a rally.

Young women who attended told Socialist Worker they were “angry with the government”.

“And we want to let out our anger,” one said. “We all know what it’s like to get cat called—I was even on my way here.”

Another added, “So many times I’ve not realised what was happening to me was wrong until I told a friend.

“The police’s handling of any movement, whether it’s against racism, sexism or the climate emergency, needs challenging.

“They exert power on us to keep us silent—it’s institutional. They work in an institution that gives them a power trip.”

The women said they want to be able to “walk safe”.

One asked, “Why do I have to get a taxi when I live a 15-minute walk away because it’s not safe?

“Men don’t have to text their friends when they’ve got home safe.”

Speakers told the crowd that the new Tory policing bill “has been made for the rich and powerful”. Cries of, “Police protect themselves” and, “All cops are bastards” followed.

### Statues

Another speaker said, “The police and the government care more about statues than women”—which was met with cries of “shame”.

Placards read, “Killed by the system we were told protects us,” and, “Blame the system, not the victim.”

The protest moved across Westminster Bridge, back to police headquarters at New Scotland Yard then back to parliament.

It stopped at Downing Street to call Boris Johnson “scum”.

Marchers shouted, “Fuck the police” and chanted, “Black Lives Matter” at the cops.

Lydia told Socialist Worker she’s “exhausted and frustrated”. “We need to take down systems that uphold sexism,” she said.

Leah and Jenny added, “The police tell us not to go home alone or go out at night but that’s giving into the problem. It normalises the fear women live with.”

Defiant marchers reached Piccadilly Circus, but police separated groups off telling people to “go home” and “to have a safe night”.

They tried to arbitrarily fine some who had separated away from the main group.

While cops roam the streets and the system that causes women’s oppression is upheld, women won’t be safe.

**Isabel Ringrose**

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# How can we end this sexist system?

by SADIE ROBINSON

**THE APPARENT police murder of Sarah Everard has lifted the lid on the foul, sexist system that we live in.**

Sarah went missing while walking to her home in Brixton, south London on 3 March. Wayne Couzens, a Metropolitan Police officer from an elite unit, has been arrested for her alleged kidnap and murder.

Met commissioner Cressida Dick said it is “incredibly rare for a woman to be abducted from our streets”. But violence against women, harassment and abuse is not rare at all.

Sarah’s disappearance has led to an outpouring of stories of harassment and abuse, as women post their experiences online. Many said they change their behaviour, such as avoiding certain places, because of fear of attack.

It’s no wonder many women are scared.

A survey last week found that nearly all young women in Britain have suffered sexual harassment. A massive 97 percent of women aged between 18 and 24 told the YouGov poll they had been harassed. And 80 percent of women of all ages had suffered sexual harassment in public spaces.

Police recorded 56,152 rapes in the year to September 2020. Reports of rape to police have nearly doubled since 2015, and many more will have gone unrecorded.

Many women don’t report rape because it is trivialised. Women are either not believed or treated as having brought attacks on themselves. Police referrals of rape cases to the Crown Prosecution

Service fell by 40 percent in the last three years.

Prosecutions and convictions have more than halved.

Nearly one in three women in England and Wales will suffer domestic violence in their lifetime. Two women are killed every single week at the hands of their partner or an ex-partner.

The figures are extremely depressing—and more distressing ones are available if we look at how women are treated across the world.

Overwhelmingly, it is men who attack women. But the majority of men don’t rape or murder women. And many are appalled at the level of sexism that exists in society.

So violence against women isn’t a problem caused by men as a group. But it isn’t just caused by nasty individuals either. The problem is much bigger than individuals and it’s rooted in the system we live in.

## Property

Under capitalism, women’s bodies are sexualised, used to sell products and treated as public property. Pornography dehumanises women, encouraging men to see women as objects that exist solely for their gratification.

Ideas about women and their bodies reflect an oppression that is ingrained at every level of society.

So, for all the gains made, women workers earned 15.5 percent less than male workers on average in Britain last year. Women still do more childcare and housework than men.

Attitudes that might seem old-fashioned about women’s role prevail. So marriage, or at least a



THOUSANDS ATTENDED the Sarah Everard vigil on Clapham Common, south London, last weekend

long-lasting romantic relationship, is still seen as a top priority that women should aspire to. Women who don’t have children are still too often judged as being strange.

These ideas didn’t develop spontaneously by themselves. They are actively encouraged.

So government ministers repeatedly talk up the importance of “the family” and blame single parents for things like knife crime.

They’ve drawn up entire tax and benefit systems that reward marriage. For instance, people who are married or in a civil partnership can cut their taxes with the marriage tax allowance. People who are living together can’t.

Married people get double the capital gains tax allowance of single people, among several other benefits.

Technically of course, everyone is “free” to live how they like. But low wages and benefits make it much less feasible for someone to afford to live alone.

It can seem hard to fathom why marriage and the family is so central to the system. But the family gives big benefits to our rulers.

It means many women take on caring roles for family members free of charge, saving the state money. When care services are cut, the fallout can be limited if women fill the gaps by looking after relatives.

Women, by still taking on more responsibility for childcare, raise the next generation of labour.

Divisions such as sexism have a wider benefit for our rulers because

they help to set working class people against each other. They encourage us to see each other as enemies instead of allies who have the same enemy—the ruling class.

So working class men are encouraged to feel that they benefit from women’s oppression. It can seem to make sense—they earn more than women on average, so surely it’s true?

But wages for workers in general are appallingly low, male and female. It isn’t a great “benefit” for a man to be poor but just not quite as poor as a woman.

Men were also encouraged to blame women for “taking their jobs” as more women began to work. And today, they are told that “political correctness gone mad” could see women promoted ahead of them.

Again, this helpfully hides the fact that the system creates unemployment and crap jobs. And it divides the working class men and women who have a common interest in fighting back.

## System

Our rulers promote divisions such as sexism because it’s much safer for them if we blame each other for our problems instead of the system.

They don’t care that these ideas can lead to violence. After all, violence is at the heart of their society. So for all the gains made, women’s oppression remains because it benefits our rulers.

This is also why disgusting sexist ideas are rife at the top, and among



PROTEST AT Scotland Yard this week

those whose job it is to protect those at the top.

Much has been said about how “shocking” it is that a police officer is implicated in Sarah Everard’s disappearance.

Yet time after time, cops are implicated in the abuse of women. Sometimes they are doing the abusing, such as forming inappropriate relationships with vulnerable victims.

Other times they are covering up the abusing, such as ignoring evidence of rape or dissuading victims from pursuing complaints.

Cressida Dick has been dismayed that a cop is implicated in Sarah’s disappearance. “Our job is to protect people,” she said.

It’s not true. The police exist to protect the system and those at

the top who benefit from it. They are useless at investigating crimes against working class women because they don’t value the victims.

Socialists should call out every instance of sexism, abuse and oppression. We should stand with women who suffer abuse and fight for justice with them.

But we shouldn’t fall into the trap of thinking men as a group are the problem.

Feminist Julie Bindel said in the wake of Sarah’s disappearance, “Only men can stop male violence.”

She is wrong. Working class men haven’t a hope of stopping violence against women while the system that creates it in the first place remains.

And the only way to get rid of that system is for working class men and women to fight together to smash it. Blaming men for violence weakens that fight.

And treating men as naturally violent cuts off any hope that we could win a world free from oppression.

Many people have called events open to men and women over the coming days to remember victims of violence and demand a better world. It’s right to protest over how women are treated—and socialists should join the protests.

To end violence against women for good, we need to get rid of oppression.

To do that we have to smash the system that created it and fight for a world where ordinary women, and men, run things in their own interests.



Cressida Dick

## Protests say Met boss should go

**CALLS ARE growing louder for Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Cressida Dick to resign following the police’s violent handling of the Sarah Everard vigil last Saturday.**

Dick defended the aggressive response, saying, “What has happened makes me more determined, not less, to lead my organisation.”

She added that people “sitting back in an armchair” shouldn’t be criticising, yet failed to say why her force reacted as they did. This isn’t the first time calls have been made for Dick to resign.

## Ramped

**Under her command stop and search has been ramped up.**

**The Met now carry out 48 percent of all stops in England and Wales—with black people nine times more likely to be stopped.**

**Yet she denied last year that the Met was slow to realise it had a race problem.**

**Dick was also the officer in charge when Jean Charles de Menezes was shot dead in 2005 after being wrongly identified as a terrorist.**

**She claimed at an inquest that she didn’t think any officer did “anything wrong or unreasonable” in the lead up to de Menezes’ death and was cleared of all charges.**

**Dick left policing for a few years after 2015 to join MI6—and did this knowingly when Scotland Yard was investigating MI6 over human rights abuses. But this was kept quiet.**

**Cressida Dick should go now.**

## On other pages...

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**Socialist Worker**  
**WHAT WE THINK**

## PROTESTS HAVE POWER TO DISRUPT THEIR SYSTEM

**T**HE RAGE of women on the streets across Britain this week at the system and the police showed the state was losing control.

After the Metropolitan Police violence at a vigil held last Saturday for Sarah Everard and the protests that followed, the establishment had no answers.

The police, the politicians and the media had to bend to an overwhelming feeling from millions in their usual control was shaken, at least for a time.

We should remember and build on their vulnerability. This is a chance to say no going back to the cover-up of how women are treated.

That’s not least because Sarah’s Everard’s alleged kidnapper and murderer is a police officer. And then women who came to mourn and demand change felt the heavy hand of the same police brutality.

One iconic photo of a woman being pinned down by several police officers forced many to ask who protects us. And if the police don’t protect us, who are they protecting?

A single event, a horrific murder, then saw many women speak out

about the routine harassment and violence that is endemic in our sexist society. The last week has put that whole society on trial.

Footage of police punching and grabbing attendees shook those at the top, but the likes of Boris Johnson and Priti Patel do not care for the police’s victims.

They fear that protests have the potential to make real change.

After days and nights of protests the system wants its control back. The Tories and the cops have tried to claim that what happened at Clapham was the result of outsiders.

Chair of the Metropolitan police federation Ken Marsh has said that the vigil turned violent after being hijacked by political groups such as Extinction Rebellion, Black Lives

**“If the police don’t protect us, who are they protecting?”**

## TORIES FIND CASH FOR WAR

**J**UST AS the government says there’s no money for more than a 1 percent pay rise for NHS workers, it unveils a 40 percent increase in nuclear warheads. Its plan for war and waste, called the defence and foreign policy review, was unveiled on Tuesday.

The number of warheads will rise from 180 to 260, enough to obliterate hundreds of millions of people. Each warhead is estimated to have an explosive power of 100 kilotons—nearly seven times the

power of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima at the end of the Second World War.

The review also demands more weapons to target Russia and China. It claims this is “in recognition of the evolving security environment” and the “developing range of technological and doctrinal threats”.

Incredibly the review believes that hurling more money into weapons of mass destruction will “strengthen the union”.

Campaign for Nuclear

Matter and Antifa. But the only hijackers were the cops. Others say we need more police to make the streets safer, rather than targeting the institution itself.

Those at the top want to deflate the movement. It’s vital that this rage is not passed over in favour of inquiries, and minor changes that will alter nothing fundamental.

In a desperate attempt to regain control, police attending protests have stood back and “kindly” reminded people that they shouldn’t be protesting.

But the real face of the system is the protest-smashing police bill being rushed through parliament this week.

The ruling elite don’t want us protesting and condemning their system and their police force, no matter how “deeply concerned” Boris Johnson might pretend he is.

But we don’t need permission from the ruling class to protest. We must fight to really reclaim the streets and our lives. Don’t be tamed, don’t be polite, don’t be drawn back into politics as usual.

Stay on the streets because mass movements are vital to demanding justice, fighting for change and protecting the right to protest.

Disarmament general secretary Kate Hudson was right to say, “This is no time to start a new nuclear arms race.”

“As the world wrestles with the pandemic and climate chaos, it beggars belief that our government is opting to increase Britain’s nuclear arsenal.”

We don’t need more weapons, and we don’t need more attempts to line up with the US’s pressure on China and Russia.

We should be abolishing armaments, not adding to them.



TRIBUTES TO Sarah Everard in Clapham



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## ANALYSIS

ALEX CALLINICOS



## Lula returns as crisis deepens in Brazil

**BRAZIL SUFFERS** from a double affliction. With 270,000 Covid-19 deaths it is second only to the US—although per head mortality is higher in Britain and other European countries.

But the pandemic is made much worse by Jair Bolsonaro, the far right populist who is president of Brazil. A Covid-denier and anti-vaxxer, he has been content to let the infections spread. This has made it easier for the more infectious P.1 Covid-19 variant, first discovered in the Amazonian city of Manaus, to spread.

Now Bolsonaro faces a potential political challenge from ex-president Lula da Silva. Lula, a former metalworkers' leader, helped to found the Workers Party (PT) in 1980. When he finally won the presidency in 2000, Lula continued the neoliberal economic policies of his right-wing predecessors, but introduced the Bolsa Familia, a direct payment to the poor.

Lacking a majority in Congress, Lula relied on deal-making with conservative politicians, often involving backhanders.

He later justified this policy, saying, "you have to put your principles on the table to make them practicable. You make an agreement with who is there, in Congress. If they are robbers, but have votes, you either have the courage to ask for them, or you lose."

This combination of neoliberal policies and implication in political corruption destroyed the presidency of Lula's ex-chief of staff and successor, Dilma Rousseff.

After winning re-election with the support of the Brazilian poor in 2012, she implemented a harsh austerity programme. Then came the exposure of the Lava Jato (carwash) scandal, in which Petrobras, the huge state energy company, was revealed to be engaged in the large-scale bribery of politicians.

The investigating magistrate, Sergio Moro, ran the case in a highly politicised and media-driven way. The logic of the operation, as Perry Anderson of New Left Review has shown in a careful analysis, was to make the PT the fall guy and protect the rest of the Brazilian political elite.

Rousseff was impeached and removed in 2016, even though her replacement, the right-winger Michel Temer, was himself revealed much more convincingly to be involved in Lava Jato.

### Convicted

Moro then accused Lula who was convicted and sentenced to first nine and then 12 years imprisonment. Almost certainly this was a fit-up, but it prevented him from standing in the 2018 president election, which, still immensely popular, he might well have won.

In the light of how Bolsonaro has handled the pandemic, Lula's framing costs many thousands of lives.

The Brazilian Marxist Valerio Arcary told me soon afterwards—"Lula in prison isn't a secondary question, it's a symbol for the politically educated, experienced sectors of the working class, who influence the younger generation.

For them Lula rotting in prison is a demonstration of the strength of the state and of the dominant class."

The way was open for Bolsonaro, an obscure member of Congress known mainly as an apologist for the military dictatorship of 1964-88, to run for president.

He tapped into the racism deep-seated in Brazilian society but also expressed the widespread anger at corruption and violent crime.

Big business was willing to back him because it wanted the PT's higher social spending reigned back. Moro was rewarded by being appointed minister of justice.

But Bolsonaro has been an even more chaotic and incompetent president than his hero Donald Trump. He hasn't delivered the radicalisation of neoliberalism promised by his finance minister, Paulo Guedes. And Lula is now free to run for president in 2022.

He served 580 days in jail, but was released in 2019 on appeal. Now a Supreme Court judge has ruled his original conviction was a mistrial.

This still has to be confirmed by the entire Supreme Court, but already Lula is back in active politics.

Maybe sections of big business would like now to see Lula back in the presidency. Anderson quotes the Brazilian political scientist Andre Singer describing the PT even at its best as "weak reformism".

Will this be enough for a Brazil ravaged by Covid-19 and economic slump?



THE POLICE at the reclaim these streets demonstration in London last Sunday

PICTURE: GUY SMALLMAN

# The alleged killer belonged to institutionally sexist force

by SIMON BASKETTER

**WAYNE COUZENS is charged with the kidnapping and murder of Sarah Everard. He is a firearms officer from Scotland Yard's elite Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command.**

He was arrested last week after Sarah disappeared when walking home to Brixton from Clapham in south London.

Couzens joined the Metropolitan Police in September 2018 when he worked for a response team covering Bromley. He then

moved to the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command in February last year.

Prior to joining the police, Couzens was in the Territorial Army. He served as a reservist with the 3rd Battalion, the Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment, based in Canterbury, from 2002 to 2004.

His first armed police job before joining the Met was protecting Dungeness nuclear power station as part of the Strategic Escort Group.

He was equipped with a rifle as he accompanied nuclear material being transported around the

country. The role ended when he failed an annual fitness test. He was effectively demoted to guarding the power station building.

The Metropolitan Police have made five referrals over the case to the tame police watchdog.

The Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) has confirmed it will probe one referral relating to the Met's handling of an indecent exposure complaint made against Couzens.

It is alleged that he exposed himself twice in one day to staff inside a McDonald's in Swanley, in Kent.

The police have repeatedly

pointed out that Couzens was off duty when Sarah Everard disappeared although he had the day before been on duty guarding the US embassy.

Questions remain over whether he was in uniform on the evening Sarah disappeared and whether he had his warrant card with him.

Couzens was charged with the kidnap and murder of Sarah on 12 March. He appeared in court on 13 March and is set to appear again on Tuesday.

He will continue to receive his police salary.

The police are once again sinking in a swamp of their own making.

## Cops prop up an unjust capitalist system

**OUR RULERS** tell us that the police exist to protect everyone equally and that they keep us safe from crime. In reality their role is to protect one section of society.

The police's real role is as part of the state. They are there to do one thing—protect the property of the minority that owns it against the mass of the people who do not.

The state tries to ensure that it alone possesses a monopoly on

physical force. Although it claims to operate in the name of society as a whole, in fact it operates as the instrument of the rich to oppress the poor.

The justice system is a reflection of the society it protects. The system itself is inherently unjust, sexist and racist.

The police exist to prop up this grubby system, so they accept the ideas that flow from it. This is why they are racist and sexist to the core.

It's why black people are disproportionately likely to die in police custody. And it's why victims of domestic violence and rape are routinely ignored.

These ideas are reinforced by the police's day to day work. They wield enormous power over others. And they are socialised within the force to stereotype sections of workers and to treat them with suspicion and contempt.

The police enforce

what those at the top like to call the rule of law. But the rule of law is only about enforcing the rules that legitimise and protect the existing system.

The role of the cops is to uphold a racist, violent system and to do this they dish out racism, intimidation and violence.

There is no lack of "professionalism" in the police who attacked the vigil last Saturday. They did what they were meant to do.



# Draconian Tory police bill targets protesters

Planned laws would let cops stop many protests—especially effective action, writes **Charlie Kimber**

**WHAT HAPPENED** on Clapham Common on Saturday evening will be repeated, but more often and with more brutality if a new bill goes through parliament.

The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill is being rushed through parliament this week. Some of its worst clauses seek to smash the right to protest effectively.

Under the Public Order Act 1986, police can impose restrictions if they say a demonstration risks “serious public disorder, serious damage to property or serious disruption to the life of the community”.

That gives them huge repressive control. But this week’s bill adds that restrictions can be imposed if the noise of a protest “may result in serious disruption to the activities of an organisation”.

Shouting outside a workplace, or parliament would be enough

Another clause targets protest noise that could have “a relevant impact on persons in the vicinity of the procession”. A further clause seeks to criminalise protests causing “serious annoyance”—a claim every boss and reactionary could use.

Numerous clauses seek to give police more powers to crackdown on protests that have “impact”. As even the liberal author Ian Dunt commented, “It aims its sights at the entire purpose of protest.”

## Comply

Previous laws have criminalised protesters who “knowingly” failed to comply with police instructions. The new law says it will be enough that they “ought to know” what the cops have decreed.

The bill even gives police the powers they would have over normal demonstrations for “one-person protests”.

In the accompanying factsheet on police protest powers, Met police commissioner Cressida Dick mentions Extinction Rebellion (XR) as an example of those who will be hit. Dick says the powers in the bill aim to deal with “protests where people are not primarily violent or

## BACK STORY

**A new Tory bill would hand more sweeping powers to the police**

- The bill would make it easier for cops to harass black people, Muslims and Travellers
- It also specifically targets the right to hold effective protests
- Cops could criminalise protests if noise has a “relevant impact” on people nearby
- They could stop one-person protests. And the home secretary can define “serious disruption”

seriously disorderly”. But as with XR “had an avowed intent to bring policing to its knees and the city to a halt”.

That means effective protests must stop.

Abandoning all pretence of balance, a Home Office source told the Daily Mail newspaper about the need to tackle protests by “crusty eco-crusaders”. They said, “Disruption caused by some lefty protests has exposed an emerging threat to our way of life, our economy and the livelihoods of the hard working majority.”

The Tories and the rich, who are the real threat to ordinary people, are repressing those who stand against their failed system.

There is an even more chilling element.

The 1986 Act hinges on the phrase “serious disruption”. The new bill allows the home secretary to “make provision about the meaning” of the phrase.

Priti Patel won’t have to debate this in parliament. She can use “statutory instruments” which have virtually no scrutiny.

The government can decide who is repressed and how. It can decide for itself who disrupts ministers, bosses, cops and racists.



## On other pages...

The Paris Commune: a workers’ democracy >> Page 14 & 15



**PLANNED NEW laws would help cops clamp down on Extinction Rebellion protests**

PICTURES: GUY SMALLMAN

## New laws pave the way for permanent harassment of young, black people

THE TORIES want the police to have more powers to harass and jail black people and Muslims, target Gypsies and Travellers and to silence protesters.

Their bill is a threat to crucial rights.

And it strips away much of the threadbare democratic control over how the cops are allowed to operate.

It includes a new trespass offence that will be used to jail Gypsy, Roma and Traveller groups.

Instead of providing adequate sites, the government wants to move trespass from a civil law offence to a criminal offence.

For the first time, we can guarantee that trespassers will indeed be prosecuted.

## Traveller

Other clauses against “unauthorised encampments” will mainly be used against Gypsy, Roma and Traveller groups.

But they could also hit homeless people making makeshift shelters and protesters.

Police will be able to stop and search people previously convicted of knife crime offences without a reason or any suspicion.



**A police stop and search in London**

This will create a class of permanent “criminals” who are continually harassed.

And because of the way knife crime laws are used, many of them will be young black people.

Much of the bill focuses on ramping up sentences for people the government can easily demonise.

It proposes, for example, the end of automatic release halfway through prison terms for violent and sexual offenders.

Yet, as Prison Reform Trust director Peter Dawson says, “Sentences for serious crime have been getting much longer for two decades now, turning our prisons into places of despair.

“But there is not a shred of evidence to show that this

runaway inflation in punishment reduces crime.”

And we can guarantee that those who are deemed a danger to the public and won’t be released early will include many Muslims and black people.

## Vicious

John Vorster, the South African minister for justice under apartheid, made a famous comment while introducing a vicious Coercion Bill in 1963.

He said he “would be willing to exchange all the legislation of that sort for one clause of the Northern Ireland Special Powers Act” in Britain.

Tyrants and dictators across the world will feel the same about the powers the Tories want now.

Already many civil liberties groups, trade unions, anti-racist campaigners and even outdoor sport organisations have spoken out against the bill.

Labour leader Keir Starmer was reported to be telling his MPs to abstain on the vote on Tuesday. After the police assault at Clapham, Labour was forced to say it will vote against. But the key arena will be in the streets.



## ROUND UP

## Coronavirus worldwide

THE TOTAL number of Covid-19 cases worldwide has now exceeded 120 million, with more than 2,670,000 dead.

Governments everywhere are sending children back to school and reopening workplaces despite the threat of new variants.

The head of Germany's public health agency has declared that the third wave has arrived.

Yet the country gradually lifted new coronavirus restrictions that were implemented in December. Elementary schools returned three weeks ago and hairdressers reopened.

Chancellor Angela Merkel has pledged that "spring 2021 will be different from spring a year ago".

Despite the improvement in the supply of vaccines, Germany has faced criticism for vaccinating too slowly. Only 3 percent of the population are fully vaccinated.

Italy is to introduce further lockdown measures in response to a spike of coronavirus cases.

Shops, restaurants and schools closed in over half of the country on Monday. Prime Minister Mario Draghi has also announced a total shutdown for three days over Easter.

Residents will be required to stay at home except for work or health reasons.

In France emergency resuscitation units are at 82 percent of capacity, the highest since late November when France was in its second lockdown. But the government is determined to avoid another lockdown.

## Bolivia's coup leader arrested

THE EX-PRESIDENT of Bolivia—installed during a right wing coup in 2019—was arrested in her home last week.

Protesters gathered outside the police station in Bolivia's capital La Paz where Jeanine Anez was held.

Anez became the interim president of the country after elected president Evo Morales was forced to flee the country after the US-backed coup.

Prosecutors have charged Anez with terrorism and sedition. She will remain in pre-trial detention for four months.

Two ministers who played important parts in the coup have also been arrested.

The minister of government, Carlos Eduardo del Castillo, described the arrest of Anez as a continuation of "the historic task of giving justice" to the Bolivian people.

This comes almost six months after the Bolivian people voted against the coup regime and for Movement For Socialism (Mas) presidential candidate Luis Arce.

# Strikes confront military attacks across Myanmar

**MYANMAR'S murderous military regime imposed martial law in parts of the country on Monday, wiping out the last vestiges of democracy.**

The move came as the army and police unleashed the worst violence yet in its battle to put down the country's opposition movement.

At least five people were killed in the city of Mandalay on Monday as police used live rounds to disperse a sit-in by teachers, health care workers, students and monks.

And 39 people were killed on Sunday as Chinese-owned garment factories were set ablaze. General Min Aung Hlaing's security forces killed at least 22 protesters in the Hlaingthaya township west of the centre of Yangon.

There are close links between the Myanmar military regime and the Chinese state.

## Beating

Even before the weekend Thomas Andrews, the United Nations special rapporteur, noted that "there is extensive video evidence of security forces viciously beating protesters, medics, and bystanders."

"There is video of soldiers and police systematically moving through neighbourhoods, destroying property, looting shops, arbitrarily arresting protesters and passers-by, and firing indiscriminately into people's homes," he said.

Militarised police raided railway workers' houses in Yangon at dawn last Wednesday in an attempt to arrest union leaders. The swoop came days after several unions, including the railway workers' union, issued a joint call for a



DEFENDING THE streets of Myanmar

nationwide stoppage. The unions said the strike would be part of a drive for "the full, extended shutdown of the Myanmar economy."

The doctors' and civil servants' strikes have also provoked the regime.

One doctor spoke to the Frontier Myanmar news website, saying, "I don't care if I face action for my decision. I'm ready to face the worst. The goal is to fight for the return of an elected government. We will continue with civil disobedience until that happens."

After the early morning raid on the railway workers, cops and soldiers returned in the evening. They fired tear gas, stun grenades and live rounds in neighbourhoods where support for the movement is strongest.

Meanwhile, 400 students who were detained in mass arrests at the beginning of March are still behind bars in the notorious Insein prison.

But among the carnage are the first signs of cracks in the regime.

Last week a group of Myanmar police fled to Mizoram, in northern

India, saying they had refused to comply with orders to shoot at protesters.

One officer told BBC news, "I was afraid that I would be forced to kill or harm innocent people who are protesting against the military."

"We feel that it was wrong for the military to overthrow an elected government."

Myanmar's workers have the power to increase the number of splits in the government if they can maintain and expand the strike in the face of brutality.

## GREECE

## Protesters and students clash with riot police

MASS demonstrations across Greece have defied police violence. Thousands of people marched in the capital Athens and the northern city of Thessaloniki last Thursday—despite lockdown bans—after brutal police assaults.

Banners demanded riot police leave city neighbourhoods and university campuses.

Protests began earlier last week in response to footage showing police severely beating a young man in the square of an Athens neighbourhood.

The man reportedly objected when police began handing out heavy fines to families sitting on benches in the square.

The cops then drew their batons and attacked him.

In the video, which went viral, onlookers express outrage as the man calls out, "I'm in pain."



Hundreds of people marched through the neighbourhood against the attack that day—followed by a protest of 5,000 on Tuesday.

Cops attacked both protests, and the demonstration on Tuesday turned into an intense battle with riot police.

Thousands of people then marched in the centre of Athens

on Thursday—a protest called by lawyers' organisations against police violence.

On the same day, thousands more also marched in Thessaloniki after riot cops stormed a student occupation at Aristotle University in the middle of the night.

It came after the Greek government passed a bill last month introducing a new police force for university campuses.

Until now, police have been banned from campuses—a legacy of an uprising in 1973, beginning at Athens Polytechnic, against Greece's then military dictatorship.

It's just one aspect of the Tory-type New Democracy government's drive to hand more power to the cops to clamp down on the right to protest.

The government also passed a law last month which demands

protest organisers get permission from authorities first—and can ban those that could disrupt businesses.

Cops have also used lockdown restrictions as a cover to crush protests.

Riot police smashed up a demonstration in support of hunger striking prisoner Hector Koufontinas in Athens last week.

Yet Greek workers have repeatedly struck and protested despite the restrictions. Health workers struck last month to demand more funding and resources for the health service.

Thousands of students also marched in Athens last Wednesday—a year to the day since schools were closed.

And on Monday many people joined International Women's Day demonstrations in city centres.



## Trans rights win at Leeds university

THIS MONTH Bee Hughes was elected higher education representative of LGBT+ members to UCU union's national executive committee.

They are only the second trans person, and the first non-binary person, to hold that seat.

This is a big step forward for trans and non-binary visibility.

But the situation at Leeds university demonstrates much more needs to be done.

Leeds' unions were presented with a greatly watered down version of the previous sector-leading policy on trans equality.

One woman said, "The amended policy makes me fearful for anyone following in my footsteps."

Campaigns against equality by the government, and the Alliance for Defending Freedom—which lobbied them to the tune of £410,000—put us on the defensive.

So did a legal challenge to the Census 2021 by Fair Play for Women.

But following a united campaign involving the trade unions, student union and staff LGBT+ network, Leeds vice-chancellor announced the revised policy was withdrawn.

And they also apologised for the hurt caused. We won.

UCU supports self-identification for all members and took a motion supporting non-binary people in the workplace to the Trades Union Congress LGBT+ conference.

Megan Povey, Leeds  
Bee Hughes, Liverpool



ILLUSTRATION: TIM SANDERS

## Smash the capitalist system that causes women's oppression

I WAS not shocked to discover that recent research has found almost all young women in Britain have experienced sexual harassment.

I was walking home from the university library once when a group of men cat-called me from the upper storey of a building I passed.

I thought nothing more of it, until I reached my street and realised one of them was following me.

The overwhelming fear that any reaction might prompt further aggression often silences women.

It shows why street harassment cannot be passed off as misplaced compliments and must be viewed as a violent threat to women's safety.

MP Zarah Sultana recently said, "Women should be able to walk home without the fear of going missing." Why in 2021 is this still a critical issue?

Why should women continue to modify their behaviour to appease a system which views their bodies as public property?

To end this oppression at an individual level, we must look towards the institutional inequality which defines women as second class citizens.

Sexual harassment is borne from capitalism, which is built on oppression and therefore justifies the abuse of women.

Women cannot come forward with their reports of sexual harassment without being subjected to scrutiny.

This scrutiny comes from an

institution that does not want to believe them, support them or promote change.

We know that the police force is firmly rooted in systemic injustice and profits from the continuation of the capitalist system.

This is also why so many women simply do not come forward at all.

The trauma women carry from risking their lives every time they leave the house is curbing their freedom in insurmountable ways.

While public space remains unsafe for women, how can we expect them to thrive, when they can't even survive?

Enough is enough. We must begin dismantling the oppressive structures which work against the freedom of all.

Willow Bowen  
York

## Workers must act, not wait for union leaders

'UNION leaders' compromises leave workers behind' (Socialist Worker, 2 March) captures the frustration felt by union activists at the squandering of mandates for action by our national leaders.

This causes a gulf between the grievances and anger of workers, and the timidity and inaction of national union leaders. This gulf has grown wider during the pandemic.

The credibility of national leaderships has worn very thin, while new dynamics in working class

resistance have emerged to fill the vacuum created.

Socialists are building networks that connect activists between workplaces. When workers take action, with or without official support, local networks are delivering solidarity that builds workers' confidence and organisation.

Socialists and trade unionists are at the heart of these networks. Readers of Socialist Worker should get involved.

Mark O'Brien  
Liverpool

## Piers Morgan could fall upwards

PIERS MORGAN has announced his departure from ITV's Good Morning Britain following a berating of Meghan Markle.

Morgan claimed he did not believe her statements about feeling suicidal and stormed off the set when he was confronted by a co-host.

Before celebrating his removal it's worth remembering that people like Morgan have an incredible ability to fall upwards.

He knew about illegal hacking of voicemails and grovelled to Donald Trump.

If this didn't disqualify him from highly paid media gigs, you can bet that the right wing media will find another use for him.

That use might come about earlier than anticipated.

With Andrew Neil's Fox News-style GB News seeking presenters, Morgan seems in for a position as a big name, loud mouth flagship host.

A cynic might suggest the episode was engineered.

Morgan's name trended all day and bolstered his reputation as a renegade who the "woke left" want

silenced.

The attention generated will give a boost to any new enterprise he joins.

Morgan and GB News want attention and clicks. I advise you—don't give them any.

Liam Doherty  
Northamptonshire

Just a thought...

## Solidarity against racism

WHAT'S THE point of Labour, full stop? It's a neoliberal party committed to the exploitative capitalist system. Our rulers love racism as it keeps us divided and focuses anger on scapegoats.

But the working class has a proud history of not being conned by this. My union branch voted to support refugees currently being treated so badly.

Protests must be called against the government's racism and the fascists they encourage.

H Booker  
Swansea

## Nationalise electricity

WHY DID so many people in Texas suffer cuts to power supplies? Decades back Texas legislators unplugged the state from the two national grids that supply electricity to the west and east sides of the US.

Private power supply businesses run ruthlessly, well-funded lobbying operations to water down attempts to enforce the necessary upgrades that could withstand the extreme weather.

We need democratically run, public owned systems for delivering electricity generated by sustainable methods based on need.

Mike Killian  
by email

## Support an NHS strike

POWER IS in the hands of the people, not the Tories. We are the many and they are the few. If nurses go on strike, we back them to the hilt.

Jim Callaghan  
On Facebook

● **SOLIDARITY** with each and every one of our amazing, dedicated NHS workers. We all need to support them.

Debbie Whitworth  
Online

## Royalty's face

HARRY marrying Meghan and the racism she has suffered is important.

At last this archaic institution has shone a light on its ugly, vile, racist, elitist bullying.

Coral Price  
On Facebook



# STRIKE! WHEN NHS WORKERS HIT BACK

Talk of industrial action is echoing around the NHS after the Tories’ offer of a 1 percent pay rise. Crucial health strikes of the past hold lessons for workers today, says Yuri Prasad

**THE EARLY 1970s were a tremendous time to be a trade unionist. The Tory government and the employers were on the ropes as strikes landed blows for better pay. And rather than national trade union leaders being in charge of action, rank and file activists often held the reins of power.**

But NHS workers must have felt as if the era of militancy was passing them by. Most clinical staff regarded themselves as “professionals” and dared not strike. And it was widely thought that ancillary workers—such as porters, cooks, cleaners—were too weak to fight.

There had never been a strike in the NHS before, and union organisation was patchy at best. As a result pay was terrible, especially for the workers at the bottom of the scale.

“The trade union leaders weren’t really interested in us,” remembers Bill Geddes. He was a senior shop steward in the Nupe union at Hammersmith Hospital in west London.

“Most ancillary workers were women,” said Bill. “At my work, many had come from Spain or Portugal on temporary visas, or were part of the Windrush Generation. These people were angry and determined to fight.

“If ever I had to go to a ‘tricky’ meeting with management I’d take about 20 of them with me. The Jamaican women in

particular had no hesitation in tearing a strip off the bosses. They’d leave them shaking in their chairs.”

In 1972 a mood of militancy finally started to spread through the NHS when the government pay deal offered £1.80 to women and £2 to men.

Bill joined other rank and file union activists to plan unofficial strikes. They knew it would take more than the half-day strike the union was offering to win. They also knew that rank and file members were far stronger than the leadership bargained for.

These stewards demanded an £8 a week pay rise, shorter hours, longer holidays and equal pay for women, while union officials sought just £4 a week.

Unofficial action spread and pushed the union to catch up. Nupe’s half-day strike in December involved 55,000 workers, and in many areas was unofficially extended to last the whole day.

There was now massive pressure on the union to call an indefinite strike. In meeting after meeting Nupe members voted for one, but the leadership wouldn’t allow it. Instead, it offered week-long selective strikes.

Pressure on the government grew as nurses in the Cohse union voted four to one for industrial action and ancillaries at over 240 hospitals struck. But by failing to call the all-out strikes needed to win, the union handed the Tories a lifeline.

The press went into overdrive against the strike, insisting that it put patients’ lives at risk. Ministers said they were determined to stand firm lest the NHS strike spread to other workers.

Socialist Worker at the time saw the risk the strike would be isolated.

“The key question for the trade union movement, especially the powerful sections, is: will you stand by and see the hospital workers driven to defeat?” it asked.

“The hospital workers must appeal over the heads of the vacillating union bosses to such powerful sections as



STRIKING NHS workers demonstrating in Dulwich, south London, in 1982

PICTURE: JOHN STURROCK

miners and car workers.”

Both these groups had recently won substantial victories by taking militant action, and some were open to the idea of solidarity action.

In the weeks that followed Nupe members continued to show heroic commitment to the strike. But all the while their leaders sought a backroom deal with the government.

By April the union settled for a terrible pay offer that was no better than the original proposal—and didn’t mention equal pay for women.

Yet defeat was not the word on the lips of the thousands who had taken part. Instead they talked of “sellout” by the Nupe leadership.

The strike didn’t win. But union organisation grew—as did workers’ confidence. Ancillaries who were once thought to be powerless had shown they could be militant.

“Lots of people who are still around today had their lives shaped by that strike,” says Bill. “Certainly for me, it was one of the best periods of my life. The way we united people from so many backgrounds on the picket lines was brilliant. It was a time when we felt like we had real power.

“The main lesson people drew was that we need to stick together.”

## How union leaders squandered anger of ‘Winter of Discontent’

WORKERS FOUGHT another round in the NHS pay fight during the dying days of Jim Callaghan’s Labour government. Between October 1978 and February 1979 Britain experienced a wave of strikes that became known as the “Winter of Discontent”.

Labour faced a huge economic crisis. It decided workers would have to sacrifice their pay—and that union leaders should help them push this through.

The result for millions of people was a huge drop in pay. Real wages for NHS staff fell by 19 percent. When ministers offered yet another below-inflation pay rise for 1979, thousands resolved to fight.

Following a massive demonstration in London, cleaners at Westminster Hospital decided they would not clean the rooms of private patients. Six women were suspended and workers walked out across central London hospitals.

The Nupe union voted against the government’s 9 percent offer—inflation was over 13 percent—and organised selective strikes. But their timid action, combined with the failure of other health unions to join, led the strike into a dead end.

One key difference between this strike and the one six years earlier was that the union leadership had tight control from start to finish.

This reduction of rank and file power featured again in a confrontation between health workers and Margaret Thatcher’s

Tory government in 1982. But it didn’t diminish the anger people felt.

Hatred of Thatcher ran deep. So when health workers rejected the government’s 4 percent pay offer, thousands rallied to their cause.

Health workers struck and by July some 70 hospitals were operating on an emergency cover only basis. There was an outpouring of solidarity as miners, dockers, steelworkers and Fleet Street printers defied the Tories’ new anti-union laws to stage solidarity strikes.

Jim Fagan was a nurse in a small unit in east London at the time.

“What I remember most was Jim Fagan (above, right) on the picket line. Picketing at the Maudsley hospital in 1988 (right)

confidence to act,” he said. “Myself and the cook at my work went to Hackney council’s direct works unit, and just the two of us picketed out the whole workforce.

“But I also remember that at the end of the strike, we didn’t feel defeated. We could have fought on.”

A day of action in September was a clear indicator of how to win. Some 2.25 million people joined it, many striking to do so. There was a groundswell of support for a general strike.

But union leaders accepted the Labour right’s idea that unions’ use of collective power had led the Tories into office in 1979.

This allowed the nurses’ RCN union, which then had a no-strike clause in its constitution, to step in and negotiate a shoddy settlement.

It won a 10 percent pay deal over

two years for nurses, but abandoned lower paid health workers to the original offer.

### TIMELINE

#### National strikes in the NHS

**1972-3** Ancillary workers launch the first national strike in the NHS

**1974** Nurses in the Cohse union strike over pay and win pay rises averaging 30 percent

**1975-6** Junior doctors strike over working hours, eventually winning overtime payments

**1979** Health workers strike over derisory pay offer. Nurses make marginal gains but most workers are left out

**1982** Health workers strike over pay and win mass support but are unsuccessful

**1988** Nurses’ strike wins large pay rises

**1989-90** Ambulance workers’ strike wins some pay improvements

**2011** Huge strike of public sector workers, including health workers, is settled badly by union leaders

**2014** Half a million NHS workers strike for four hours over pay, including midwives taking action for the first time

**2016** Junior doctors strike over new contracts which include more weekend and night work



On the picket line at Charing Cross hospital in London in 1988

PICTURE: JOHN STURROCK

## ‘Our strike won for both nurses and patients’

THE TORIES didn’t hesitate when they offered health workers a pitiful 3 percent pay rise in 1987. They had seen off the Miners’ Strike two years earlier. Surely nothing could touch them now?

But the darkness of the Thatcher years was broken in December by a wave of unofficial health strikes. Workers with no experience of previous defeats often initiated them.

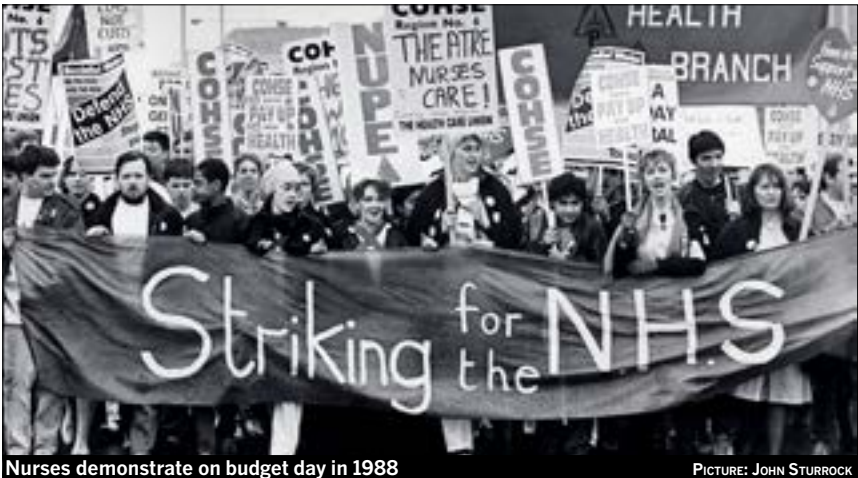
Action began in February 1988 when 38 nurses from North Manchester General Hospital struck.

Within days nurses in Glasgow and Edinburgh were out for 24 hours over threatened privatisation. Pressure grew on the Cohse and Nupe health unions to call a national strike.

In a bid to manage the anger, the TUC organised a 100,000-strong national demonstration in March. But it refused to allow striking nurses to address the rally, fearing the action was spiralling out of the union’s control.



**The Tories were playing divide and rule. We weren’t going to stand for that**



Nurses demonstrate on budget day in 1988

PICTURE: JOHN STURROCK

Eventually union leaders called a national strike—then quickly grasped an opportunity to end it after the Tories promised to up their offer. It was a double cross.

The government wanted to split workers by downgrading some and rewarding others using a “regrading exercise”.

Soon nurses were picketing again. In Burnley, Lancashire, nurses burned their regrading forms. Karen Reissmann, a Cohse member and psychiatric nurse, was one of them.

She said, “Some of us had done well out of the regrading. I’d been awarded a 36 percent rise, for instance, which reflected how scared of our strikes the Tories were.

#### Unofficially

“But they were trying to play divide and rule by paying some of us far less. We weren’t going to stand for that.

“At a mass meeting in November we voted to strike. We didn’t know that you were supposed to have a formal ballot—we simply put our hands up and walked out.

“There were 300 of us, and we stayed out unofficially for a month.”

The national strike wave subsided at the end of the year as the Tories were forced to climb down.

“Most of us got big rises—but that wasn’t the main gain,” said Karen.

“For years afterwards management were careful not to piss us off. In our hospital, that meant better services for patients, more staff, more resources—and a much stronger union.”



## WHAT WE STAND FOR

These are the core politics of the Socialist Workers Party.

## INDEPENDENT WORKING CLASS ACTION

Under capitalism workers' labour creates all profit. A socialist society can only be constructed when the working class seizes control of the means of production and democratically plans how they are used.

## REVOLUTION NOT REFORM

The present system cannot be patched up or reformed as the established Labour and trade union leaders say.

It has to be overthrown. Capitalism systematically degrades the natural world. Ending environmental crisis means creating a new society.

## THERE IS NO PARLIAMENTARY ROAD

The structures of the present parliament, army, police and judiciary cannot be taken over and used by the working class. They grew up under capitalism and are designed to protect the ruling class against the workers.

The working class needs an entirely different kind of state—a workers' state based upon councils of workers' delegates and a workers' militia.

At most parliamentary activity can be used to make propaganda against the present system.

Only the mass action of the workers themselves can destroy the system.

## INTERNATIONALISM

The struggle for socialism is part of a worldwide struggle. We campaign for solidarity with workers in other countries.

We oppose everything which turns workers from one country against those from other countries.

We oppose racism and imperialism. We oppose all immigration controls.

We support the right of black people and other oppressed groups to organise their own defence. We support all genuine national liberation movements.

The experience of Russia demonstrates that a socialist revolution cannot survive in isolation in one country.

In Russia the result was state capitalism, not socialism.

In Eastern Europe and China a similar system was later established by Stalinist parties. We support the struggle of workers in these countries against both private and state capitalism.

We are for real social, economic and political equality of women.

We are for an end to all forms of discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

We oppose discrimination against disabled people including those who experience mental distress.

We defend the right of believers to practise their religion without state interference.

## THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

To achieve socialism the most militant sections of the working class have to be organised into a revolutionary socialist party.

Such a party can only be built by activity in the mass organisations of the working class.

We have to prove in practice to other workers that reformist leaders and reformist ideas are opposed to their own interests.

We have to build a rank and file movement within the unions.

To join us, turn to page 16 or go to [www.swp.org.uk](http://www.swp.org.uk) or phone 020 7840 5602

## Socialist Workers Party online meetings



COPS ARREST a protester in Manchester

## Free speech, the Tories and defending our rights

## BRIGHTON &amp; HOVE

Thu 25 Mar, 6.30pm  
841 2142 3683

## LONDON: HACKNEY

Thu 25 Mar, 7.30pm  
798-534-2585

## PORTSMOUTH

Wed 24 Mar,  
7.30pm  
488-934-2809

## SOUTHAMPTON

Wed 24 Mar,  
7.30pm  
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## BOURNEMOUTH

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Wed 24 Mar, 7.30pm  
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Thu 25 Mar, 7pm  
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# Black Power in Britain—as told by those who fought

A new BBC documentary tells the history of anti-racist resistance in the 60s and 70s, featuring interviews with leading activists, writes **Elizabeth Adofo**

**TWO SIMPLE words—Black Power—fostered a movement of radical anti-racism across the world.**

We might be very familiar with its roots in the black liberation movement in the US, following on from the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Panthers.

But it's refreshing to see a documentary dedicated to looking at the movement in Britain.

Black Power—A British Story of Resistance tells the important and almost forgotten history of the rise and fall of the British Black Power movement of the 60s and 70s.

Its most impressive feature by far is the accounts from so many of the movement's major leaders, musicians, poets and photographers. It features better-known names such as Laila Hassan Howe, but many others activists are telling their story on screen for the first time.

The documentary begins by painting a picture of the reality of what racism was really like in Britain, starting from the Windrush Generation.

The movement was forged in these conditions. The British Black Power movement was inspired by a generation of black and Asian teenagers who felt they could no longer stay silent.

It also explores how events—both in Britain and around the world—shaped the movement.

Writer James Baldwin, the emerging reggae scene, as well as the struggle against South African apartheid played a crucial role in shaping the new radicals.

In Britain activists were shaped by the 1958 Notting Hill riots and the stabbing of black man Kelso Cochrane.

On top of that, the 1964 general election had been characterised by racist campaigning. Vile rhetoric from conservative MPs such as Enoch Powell and Pete Griffiths all stoked up anti-immigration rhetoric.

It's eye opening to learn of how many radical black power political organisations were set up in response to this and how they all organised.

The documentary particularly emphasises how this all culminated in the protests to defend the Mangrove Nine—leading black activists targeted by the cops.

It puts these struggles at the centre of the movement. And it exposes how ruthless the state can be in trying to break them.

The programme ends by focusing on lessons we can take away, and a reflection on Black Lives Matter. It is a valuable piece of history.

**Black Power—A British Story of Resistance** is on BBC2 at 9pm, Thursday 25 March and then afterwards on BBC iPlayer



JAMAL KHASHOGGI'S fiancée Hatice Cengiz outside the consulate where he was killed

## The truth behind the Khashoggi killing

### FILM

#### THE DISSIDENT

Coming soon to streaming platforms in Britain

YOU COULD easily mistake *The Dissident* for a Hollywood thriller at times.

The camera pans over the night time city skyline and a man in a hotel room talks furtively into a phone about revenge and illegal acts. Omar Abdulaziz—an internet activist—is a wanted man.

Through him we're introduced to a story of a gruesome political assassination, and a dangerous international pursuit to bring those responsible to justice.

But *The Dissident* isn't a thriller, it's a documentary.

It's the true story of the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, the Saudi Arabian journalist who walked into his country's consul in Istanbul and disappeared.

In chilling detail it shows exactly how he was murdered by a crack team of Saudi assassins. We also learn that shortly before his murder, Khashoggi began

financing a network of Twitter accounts, launched by Abdulaziz, to criticise Saudi crown prince Mohammed Bin Salman.

This is something Saudi spies likely knew, having hacked both their phones using Israeli spyware technology. But the motives for Khashoggi's killing were much bigger than that.

Khashoggi was not a typical "dissident".

#### Insider

Instead, the film says, he was a regime insider and a careful agitator for reform. In interviews, Khashoggi insists the Saudi king is "not a dictator. He rules by consensus, and I'm sure the tide eventually will be won over by the reformists."

But the changing shape of politics in the Middle East puts him on the wrong side of the regime.

The Arab Spring terrified the Saudi regime—and convinced Khashoggi that repressive governments have to reform if they are to survive. He supported parts of Bin Salman's plan to

"modernise" the Saudi state, but opposed the prince's crackdown on critics.

Bin Salman wanted to establish Saudi Arabia as a renewed dominant power in the Middle East, closely linked to the US under Donald Trump.

He didn't want his plan undermined by critics—and feared the dissent that Khashoggi was apparently encouraging.

The brutal murder of Khashoggi is where these threads tie together. *The Dissident* leaves no doubt that Bin Salman personally ordered—and possibly even watched via video link—Khashoggi's assassination.

It backfired spectacularly. The murder became an international scandal. High profile politicians and business people pulled out of an international conference to win support for him and his regime.

The world knows Bin Salman is a murderer.

Yet, as the film ends by pointing out, no state has ever taken action against him, including—pointedly—the US.

**Nick Clark**

### FILM FESTIVAL

#### BFI FLARE

Films showing online at [bfi.org.uk](http://bfi.org.uk) from 17-28 March

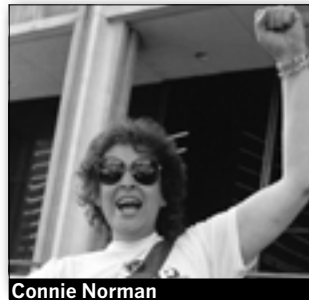
BFI FLARE is an LGBT+ film festival—this year online due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Films are available to watch at any time throughout the festival, with tickets from £5 for 16-25 year olds.

Films include *AIDS DIVA—The Legend of Connie Norman*.

It's a portrait of Connie Norman, a Los Angeles-based activist who worked tirelessly to make a difference in the struggle for support for people with Aids.

Norman is also shown as a nuanced early



Connie Norman

spokesperson for trans rights.

*Cured* is for anyone who wants to gain a deeper understanding of activist pioneers and their achievements—both before and after Stonewall.

The story of social and medical injustice carried out by medical boards in the US comes alive through newly rediscovered archive footage, original interviews and a keen sense of just what was at stake.

BFI describes *Mama Gloria* as a "love letter to a charismatic activist", and "a warm and honest depiction of trans life in Chicago's Black community".

Gloria Allen, also known as 'Mama Gloria', narrates her life from early



Gloria Allen

childhood and becoming a fixture of the ball scene in Chicago's South Side to creating a charm school for local trans girls.

BFI also says that "Gloria's unique perspective dispels the myth that aggressive racism only existed in the southern states."



**T**HE Paris Commune, where workers briefly took power and created the first workers' government, was born 150 years ago this month.

A workers' movement ran the city for 72 days between March and May 1971, with freedom and democracy at its core.

Revolutionary Karl Marx described the Paris Commune as, "The first revolution in which the working class was openly acknowledged as the only class capable of social initiative, even by the great bulk of the Paris middle class—shopkeepers, tradesmen, merchants—the wealthy capitalist alone excepted."

And the revolutionary Frederick Engels later wrote, "Look at the Paris Commune. That was the dictatorship of the proletariat."

The Commune emerged from a French military defeat.

In 1870 war began between France and Prussia. French forces were swiftly smashed by the beginning of October 1870, and Paris was under total siege.

France's rulers signed an armistice with Prussia at the end of 1870, which betrayed the ordinary people and the forces that had tried to defend Paris. In particular the deal enraged the National Guard, a force that was based on the poorer sections.

The central committee of the National Guard had distributed 400 cannons across working class areas of the city ready for attack.

To establish its control, the head of the new provisional government that emerged from the armistice, Adolphe Thiers, ordered the cannons should be seized on 18 March.

But resistance broke out when the French army advanced.

The army managed to secure the cannons but they were met by hundreds of workers who started to gather. Women played a key role in the resistance.

Louise Michel, a member of the National Guard, was given the role of defending the arms.

Michel rang church bells and mobilised 200 women to confront the 3,000 strong army. This signalled the start of the revolt.

Michel wrote, "We ran up at the double, knowing that at the top was an army in battle formation. We expected to die for liberty. All womankind was at our side—I don't know how."

Thiers ordered the soldiers to fire at the mobilisation and disarm the workers. But the soldiers refused, leading to sections of the army uniting with the Parisians against the generals.

Two army generals were assassinated by their soldiers and Thiers ordered an evacuation of Paris.

Women made huge gains



# THE PARIS COMMUNE A WORKERS' DEMOCRACY

To celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Paris Commune  
**Sam Ord looks at the importance of the first workers' government, and how it influenced the ideas of Karl Marx**



Louise Michel

during the uprising. They built barricades, took up arms and joined committees. This included education committees that imposed a free education system that, for the first time, educated women.

However, they were not given the vote. Michel, like Marx, knew that for women's liberation to be achieved they had to fight for it.

She said, "It is true, perhaps, that women like rebellions. We are no better than men in respect to power, but power has not yet corrupted us."

On 26 March the workers



**The army secured the cannons but they were met by hundreds of workers**

chose to elect their own council that worked in their own interest for safety and liberation.

Marx wrote, "The old world writhed in convulsions of rage at the sight of the Red Flag."

Engels later said that "the Commune made use of two infallible expedients". Firstly it filled all posts by election.

Secondly, all officials regardless of rank were paid the same as other workers. This was also to prevent careerism.

Unlike bourgeois parliaments, all members were held democratically accountable

if they lied or retreated, to safeguard the Commune from corruption. The Commune made the National Guard the main armed body.

It also created a wage cap, closed pawn shops, suspended debt and separated the church and state.

It abolished child labour, granted pensions to unmarried partners of killed guardsman, and established the right of employees to take over a business.

The Commune also raised calls for internationalism. Workers stood against the nationalism that former bourgeois leaders represented.

"The flag of the Commune is the flag of the world's republic," they wrote.

Engels later said that the Commune directly challenged bourgeois chauvinism and that the international working class understood this.

But the ruling class in France wasn't content with the National Guards' leadership—they didn't want workers to be running society.

They put aside nationalist differences with Prussian generals and collaborated to destroy the armed Parisian workers.

As Marx predicted, the Commune didn't achieve full state power as the external forces were too great.

**O**N 21 May state forces broke into the city and slaughtered National Guard troops and civilians. By 28 May the Commune was suppressed by the army and harsh repression followed.

Eyewitness Prosper Lissagaray described how the rich took their revenge as they retook the city. He wrote, "The kid-glove populace followed the prisoners, acclaiming the gendarmes who conducted the convoys, applauding at the sight of the blood-covered vans."

"The civilians strove to outdo the military in levity."

"Elegant and joyous women, as in a pleasure trip, betook themselves to the corpses, and, to enjoy the sight of the valorous dead, with the ends of sunshades raised their last coverings."

Over 30,000 people were killed in fighting or executed. Over 7,000 more, including Michel, were exiled.

Military trials were held for up to 40,000 prisoners, resulting in execution, solitary confinement and forced labour.

The suppression and exploitation of the French working class would continue despite the gains made by the Commune.

The Commune had been crushed. But as Marx said, the experience of "storming heaven" gave an inspiring example for others to follow.

It had created a concrete example of the sort of democratic society that workers could find if they seized control.



THE STREETS of Paris following the attack by the army

## Karl Marx on the 'the glorious harbinger of a new society'

**T**HE Commune was crucial in shaping Karl Marx's understanding of both the importance of class and the role of the state.

Reflecting on the revolt enabled him to deepen and extend his ideas.

As Vladimir Lenin was later to write, "The only 'correction' Marx thought it necessary to make to the Communist Manifesto he made on the basis of the revolutionary experience of the Paris Commune."

Marx rejected the idea that the working class could advance just by moving to the head of the existing state.

What the Commune showed was "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes".

"Instead, the next attempt of the French Revolution will be no longer, as before, to transfer the bureaucratic-military machine from one hand to another, but to smash it," Marx wrote.

In its place would come a completely different mechanism of workers' democracy and control.

This would abolish many of the features of the old form of state, and fully democratise those that were

still necessary to combat the old ruling class.

Marx wrote, "While the merely repressive organs of the old governmental power were to be amputated, its legitimate functions were to be wrested from an authority usurping pre-eminence over society itself, and restored to the responsible agents of society."

The working class would take back its power from the bourgeois state that ruled over it.

This crucial lesson for future revolutions was why Marx said that the workers' Paris "with its Commune, will be forever celebrated as the glorious harbinger of a new society."

"Its martyrs are enshrined in the great heart of the working class."

Class was crucial. Unlike prior revolutions the working class collectively showed their power to control the means of production and distribution in their interest.

So, Marx wrote, "The emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself."

The experience of the Commune is crucial to the arguments today about the limits of working through existing state institutions.



Karl Marx (top)  
The French army takes Paris (above)

### READ MORE

● The Paris Commune  
Donny Gluckstein  
£12.99

● Genderquake: socialist women and the Paris Commune  
International Socialism journal article by Judy Cox  
[isj.org.uk/genderquake-paris-commune/](http://isj.org.uk/genderquake-paris-commune/)

● The Civil War in France  
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## What's behind the surge in 'fire and rehire' attacks?

Fire and rehire is a weapon bosses are using to attack workers. **Sophie Squire** looks at why it's being used

DURING THE pandemic bosses have seized on a way to exploit workers more—the practice of fire and rehire.

It was the chosen tool of British Airways when it tried to force workers to accept contracts that would see them suffer pay cuts of around 25 percent last year.

And British Gas engineers, and bus drivers in Manchester are currently striking to sack them and rehire them on worse contracts.

The problem is widespread. The TUC union federation found that 9 percent of workers have been told to reapply for their jobs on worse terms and conditions since last March.

Nearly a fifth of 18-24 year olds say their employer has tried to rehire them on inferior terms during the pandemic.

And twice as many black and minority ethnic workers have been faced with fire and rehire as white workers.

While fire and rehire is not a new tool—it was used, for example, by bosses at supermarket Asda in 2019—coronavirus has ushered in a new wave of its use.

### Impact

Many firms face a squeeze on their profits. To restore them, bosses are bullying workers and using the threat of unemployment to force them to accept worse contracts.

Others, even though they are profitable, see a chance to ram through assaults on pay and conditions that can be blamed on the virus emergency.

Of course the previous terms won't be restored after it passes.

Fire and rehire effectively sidelines trade union officials from significant negotiations.

The company or firm presents workers individually with a choice.

They can sign a new contract or be out of a job.



MANCHESTER BUS strikes are tackling fire and rehire

Sometimes workers are even bribed into signing by a financial incentive.

If workers sign these contracts they are considered to have "agreed" to the new terms.

This not only gives the bosses legal justification but also excludes trade unions from effective bargaining.

Unions such as Unite and the GMB are currently putting energy and publicity into highlighting how insidious fire and rehire is.

That's partly because it's such an overt attack.

It's also because it's a threat to the bureaucracy itself. If you take negotiations out of disputes then the union bureaucracy has little function.

The trend of fire and rehire also points to a larger problem that has been accelerated by the coronavirus crisis.

Workers have been stripped of many of the assurances that were won after the Second World War.

Decades of neoliberalism pushed by those at the top has meant welfare reforms have been gradually snatched away—from council



**Workers are not powerless to fight back**

housing to free education.

And another assurance to workers has been stripped away—that it is possible to have a secure job for life.

Many British Gas strikers have worked for the company for decades. They believed that their jobs were secure and valued.

To discover that, in reality, this security and value was a lie can heighten the bitterness and resentment felt by workers.

This resentment has the potential to push workers in different directions—to left wing collective struggle or right wing despair.

Even if the bosses manage to force through fire and rehire, this bitterness would be long-lasting.

### Gamble

Fire and rehire is a gamble for bosses.

They run the risk of losing highly-trained workers.

They could also fuel deep resentment against the way the company has acted.

And it's much harder to persuade workers that "we're all in it together" when you have just obliterated their rights by the threat of the sack.

But while fire and rehire is a vicious threat, workers are not powerless to fight back.

The bosses rely on the labour of the very same employees they threaten to fire.

A collective response from workers—protesting, striking and refusing the blackmail—remains the only way to beat fire and rehire.



## Does the Egyptian revolutionary spark live on?

by CHARLIE KIMBER

AFTER THE defeat of a revolution, there are always three reactions.

Sections of the ruling class declare that the whole project was evil or that the good intentions were hijacked by malicious agitators.

Today Egypt's bloody dictator Abdel Fattah al-Sisi blames the revolution for unleashing economic suffering and terrorism.

Real revolutionaries say it was right to fight but resolve that next time our side will do it better—and succeed.

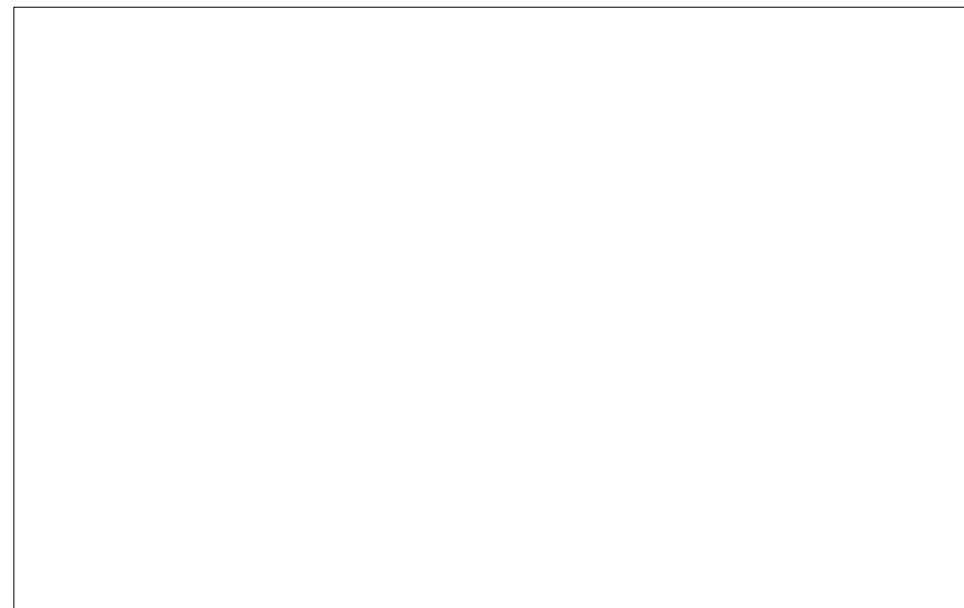
The Russian revolutionary Vladimir Lenin expressed this well after the defeat of the 1905 revolution. "Just wait, 1905 will come again," he wrote. "That is how the workers look at things.

### Model

"For them that year of struggle provided a model of what has to be done.

"For the intellectuals and the renegading petty bourgeois it was a model of what should not be done."

Lenin added that the working class had to learn



**IN RECENT years ordinary people have toppled dictators and challenged the system—such as in Sudan in 2019—showing that revolution is alive and well**

how to make the methods of insurrectionary strikes and armed struggle "more massive, more concentrated and more conscious".

In contrast, the liberals would seek to replace what they saw as the "naïve impulsiveness of untamed mass struggle" with "cultured

and civilised' constitutional work". Twelve years after 1905 the revolution did indeed come again in Russia. That time it was successful.

So it is with the Egyptian Revolution. The horrors of Egyptian society now should not be used to eliminate the hope of 2011 or the power

of revolution. Today tens of thousands of political prisoners, particularly socialists and those from the Muslim Brotherhood, are caged in jails.

But there are important gains that can never be taken away. Above all millions of Egyptians felt their power

and saw the potential for fundamental change.

And the revolution set an example for new generations.

It confirmed that strikes and mass protests can topple a brutal regime. And it demonstrated that ordinary people can do this themselves.

It showed that a revolutionary process can transform, at least temporarily, women's role in society and challenge the oppression of other groups.

### Demands

It proved that a movement that begins with the demand of removing a particular member of the ruling class can raise issues such as democracy in the workplace and the whole running of society.

It confirmed that a revolution in one country can cause international shockwaves.

Egypt also provides lessons to remember.

It is not enough to remove a dictator—it is necessary to uproot the whole system that produced the tyrant. The army generals and the police

chiefs may at times claim to support a revolution but ultimately they will organise to crush it.

And without a revolutionary socialist organisation, the politics of compromise with the old order will win out—with disastrous results.

The factors that produced the Arab Spring have not gone away.

Workers in revolt across the world will be faced with similar challenges to those in Egypt ten years ago.

The revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg in her last published work threw a defiant challenge to the ruling class after the defeat of the 1919 German revolution.

She said, "Order prevails in Berlin!" You foolish lackeys! Your 'order' is built on sand.

"Tomorrow the revolution will 'rise up again, clashing its weapons', and to your horror it will proclaim with trumpets blazing 'I was, I am, I shall be!'"

This is the last in a series of articles on Egypt in revolution. Read our coverage at [bit.ly/EgyptSW2021](http://bit.ly/EgyptSW2021)

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# Council cuts to services will fail those who rely on them

Reports suggest that the majority of local councils will impose further cuts. They're caused by decades of austerity, not Covid-19, argue **Sadie Robinson** and **Charlie Kimber**

**ORDINARY** people across England face yet more savage cuts to services as councils finalise their budgets. And they'll be expected to pay more to get less as many authorities plan to raise council tax by up to 5 percent.

In England, the overwhelming majority of councils—94 percent—expect to cut spending, according to a National Audit Office (NAO) report. At least 25 claim they face bankruptcy.

Some councils admitted that their cuts would have “direct and immediate effects on service users”.

Examples include library closures, fewer waste collections, cuts to bus route subsidies and cuts to homelessness support.

They also include “reviews” of adult social care and special educational needs and disabilities packages.

The NAO report highlighted the impact of the pandemic on councils.

Councils have spent an extra £6.9 billion on Covid-related services, such as helping with test, track and trace and housing rough sleepers.

They expect extra coronavirus spending to amount to £6.9 billion this year—12.5 percent of their expenditure last year.

At the same time, councils expect to have lost £2.8 billion in 2020-21 due to the pandemic.

The closure of facilities means they are short of money from



USERS OF Handsworth public services in Birmingham protest against cuts in 2016

PICTURE:KEVIN HAYES

car parking charges and from attractions such as leisure centres and museums.

Councils expect to lose a further £2.1 billion of revenue this year.

Yet the pandemic hasn't caused the council crisis. The NAO pointed

out that a decade of austerity has made councils “more vulnerable” to the impact of Covid-19.

Austerity has cut councils' spending power by a third. It has also made councils “more reliant” on money from local fees and charges,

and council tax. Meanwhile there “have been increases in demand for adult social care, children's social care and homelessness services”.

In the week that the NAO published its report, the Labour-run Nottingham city council approved a

plan to axe 272 jobs. That's around 5 percent of the workforce.

Labour-run Leeds city council plans £87 million in cuts including slashing nearly 800 jobs.

And the leader of the Labour-run Birmingham council Ian Ward wants “£20 million of new savings, on top of £21 million that are already set to be delivered in the year ahead”.

The council has made over £730 million in cuts since 2010.

Labour councils often simply blame the Tories for their cuts—and its right to be furious with the Tories.

But councils could resist (see below). And they could use reserves to fund services.

The NAO found that, while some councils face “financial failure” because of “funding gaps and low reserve levels” most don't.

Just 1.5 percent of all authorities are at “acute” risk of failure, and another 5.9 percent are high risk.

Councils had £24.6 billion in reserves at the end of March last year, figures published last month showed.

The money's there for jobs and services.

But it will take a fight to make sure it is spent.

**What's your story?**  
Email with your ideas  
reports@socialistworker.co.uk

## Labour's May election campaign lacks resistance to the Tories

**LABOUR** launched its campaign for the 6 May elections last week. It made clear that there will be no systematic resistance to council cuts.

The May votes bring together elections postponed from last year and ones scheduled for this year.

It will include polls for district and county councils, police and crime commissioners and city mayors, including in London.

Voting in the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Senedd elections will take place on the same day.

It will be a major test of opinion.

### Popular

Labour leader Keir Starmer tried to connect the party to others who are popular, perhaps in recognition of how unpopular his leadership has been. So his main message was, “In these elections, a vote for Labour is a vote to support our nurses.”

Yet when questioned Starmer refused to back the unions' pay claims. He would only say that “the starting point should be the 2.1 percent increase” contained in earlier health budgets.

There is no plan to use positions that Labour wins to begin new resistance to the Tories.

At Labour's election launch Starmer claimed, “Our amazing Labour councils and councillors have gone above and beyond.”

Their real record is of implementing Tory-imposed cuts.

Councils are responsible for almost a quarter of all public expenditure in England.

They could be a base for a fightback

In the 1980s there was some resistance to the Tories at council level. It was insufficient and failed to engage the real power of working class people.

But councillors at least talked of refusing to implement cuts and won some gains. This was swiftly replaced by Labour leader Neil Kinnock's “dented shield” approach, urging Labour councils to make cuts in a “better way”.

Grudging acceptance soon became a positive argument for “making tough decisions” and “having the courage” to stay in office while central government slashed budgets.

Jeremy Corbyn's leadership did not change this. One of his early acts was to tell councils not to set what were termed “illegal budgets”.

The 2016 Labour conference

went further. It made it a disciplinary offence for a Labour councillor to “support any proposal to set an illegal budget” or to “vote against or abstain on a Labour group policy decision on this matter”.

### Outsourced

Labour councils could do a lot more. They could rule out further privatisation and bring outsourced services back under council control. They could use reserves and borrowing powers to remove the need for cuts.

But only a mass campaign of protests, occupations and strikes could defend a no-cuts council and push back the Tories.

And Labour would very soon have to face this central issue.

In its absence, Labour councils will be just another group of politicians delivering essentially the same cuts.



# Bus strikers fight on as Tories deliver more cash to owners

by SAM ORD

**STRONG BUS strikes in London and Manchester continue to confront the bosses' attacks on both conditions and pay.**

Manchester drivers for operating company Go North West have been taking to picket lines daily since 28 February.

They're faced with the threat of fire and rehire, despite the fact that the company grabbed profits of £12.3 million.

If implemented the new contracts will force drivers to work longer hours for no additional pay. They could lose up to £2,500 a year.

The existing sick pay policy will also be terminated. This will force drivers to work when they're ill or should be self-isolating. Alongside this, the workforce will be cut by 10 percent.

The Unite union has expressed outrage at Go-Ahead, operator of Go North West, after the publication of its half-year results.

The company took £218 million in funding from the government to maintain bus services. But this money will be used to pay a dividend to shareholders.

Unite passenger transport officer, Bobby Morton said, "The sheer greed of Go-Ahead has been laid bare."

## Shareholders

"Go-Ahead is intent on using taxpayers' money to pay dividends to fat cat shareholders at the same time that they are cutting the pay of bus drivers who have kept the service running throughout the pandemic."

"Go-Ahead's attitude shows all that is wrong about the UK's privatised bus service."

Privatised bus services mean disaster for passengers and workers.

Drivers for three subsidiaries of operating company, RATP in West and South London extended their strike last week to every Wednesday in March.

The dispute, which affects over 2,000 workers, has rallied strikers to picket lines to express their frustration. They're facing attacks on pay while their bosses receive bonuses.

Drivers claim that RATP is using the pandemic as a smokescreen to implement attacks on pay.

The government has introduced a new bus strategy which includes £3 billion in extra funding.

This funding promises to make buses, "more frequent, cheaper, greener, and easier to use," according to the government website.

The government also promises more regular services on weekends and simpler bus fares.

But Unite, which represents 70,000 bus drivers across Britain,



BUS WORKERS at Park Royal in London on strike last month

PICTURE: GUY SMALLMAN

## BACK STORY

**In Manchester and London bus strikes have taken the fight directly to the bosses**

● In a brilliant result Manchester drivers voted by 82 percent for strikes on a 77 percent turnout at the start of this year

● Workers have also taken up the issue of overcrowding on the buses. Unite has hit back at bosses who tell drivers that a 30-person maximum doesn't apply to school children

says that these measures won't reverse the years of service cuts and could increase unemployment.

Increase in contactless payments and moves to make buses more environmentally friendly are welcome but the workers have been completely ignored.

Unite is frustrated that the strategy fails to introduce minimum standards for bus drivers' pay and conditions. Morton said, "Fares have increased, services have reduced, private operators cherry-pick the most profitable routes."

"The National Bus Strategy specifically excludes the best solution which would be to allow local authorities to work together to operate their own services."

Buses should be taken off private firms.

## Angry NHS workers join 'slow clap' protests against the government's '1 percent pay insult

HEALTH WORKERS showed their anger at the Tories' 1 percent pay offer on Thursday of last week by slow clapping in disgust.

NHS workers made videos of themselves and their colleagues ironically clapping Boris Johnson to mock the way he urged people to join the Claps for the NHS last year.

Johnson insists that no extra money is available to health workers—despite handing over £37 billion to the failing test and trace programme.

Workers at Homerton hospital in east London made lots of separate videos in different departments and took their protest out into the hospital grounds too.

Protesters carried placards that read, "1 percent won't pay the rent," and, "Nurses are for life, not just for Covid".

Their videos were followed by others from workers at St Thomas' and UCH hospitals in central London and community health workers in east London.

All featured health workers exhausted by a year of fighting

the pandemic—but also furious that the government had decided to insult them.

Nurses, porters, campaigners and local trade unionists stood outside Manchester Royal Infirmary too in an impromptu protest. There were similar actions in Harlow, Barnsley, Sheffield and Birmingham.

In Bristol, campaigners from the People before Profit group held a car cavalcade around the Bristol Royal Infirmary.

"We were joined by activists from Unite union health branch, Protect Our NHS, and other trade unionists as we drove around the hospital," one Unison union member said.

## Physical

"To see numbers of hospital workers waving and giving the thumbs up from the windows of the hospital made it clear that it was a good thing to do," added another.

It's good that physical protests happened—especially after nurse Karen Reissmann was fined £10,000 recently for organising a small, socially-

distanced demonstration in Manchester. Police said she had broken Covid-19 laws that outlaw gatherings.

Unison, the biggest of the health service unions, initiated the slow clap protest—and it now plans further action on 1 April. That's the day NHS workers were supposed to receive a new pay award, which has now been put back by months.

The national union's backing for the action gave confidence to activists to go further than officials had intended.

Many used making the videos as an excuse to get round their hospitals and talk to people about the possibility of striking against the 1 percent offer.

Most health workers know that their pay will remain low, and that thousands of vital posts will remain unfilled, unless they fight back at the government.

Already the nurses' RCN union has announced it has created a £35 million industrial action. Every union needs to start seriously building momentum for strikes—even if ballots are still some way off.



## BRITISH GAS

# Now escalate against British Gas blackmail

by SOPHIE SQUIRE

**THOUSANDS OF British Gas workers were set to begin another four-day strike on Friday in their long-running battle against fire and rehire.**

The GMB union members completed their 34th day of strikes on Monday.

They are fighting parent company Centrica's plan to sack and rehire the workforce on 31 March unless workers sign up to punitive new contracts.

But some workers are worried after the GMB told them they should sign the contract before 25 March.

## Contract

In an email to strikers, seen by Socialist Worker, the union said, "If you plan to stay with British Gas after March 31 and intend to ultimately sign a new contract, our lawyers' advice is to do so by noon on March 25 if you want to avoid the loss of protected terms and changes you have fought for."

British Gas engineer Alex says the company "started to offer the contract to us



LEEDS STRIKERS last weekend

PICTURE: LAURA MILES

on an individual basis" after workers voted to reject a deal earlier this month.

"We were told that if you don't sign you lose the negotiated parts of the new deal—which aren't much," he told Socialist Worker.

Workers voted to reject this new offer by an impressive 79 percent.

They were then called into individual consultations with management with many expressing online how they felt bullied and harassed during the session.

One worker wrote on Twitter, "Some engineers will end up signing the new contract under emotional and mental duress."

He is disappointed with the union's advice, saying, "The whole point of industrial action was to get fire and rehire dropped."

But a number of workers have said they will hold out after the 31st and won't sign the new contract.

One British Gas worker, who had done a Twitter poll, said, "Final result of our mini

poll. I guess it's a small indicator and just under 300 votes, the percentage is almost three to one not signing."

Through the course of this dispute, workers have voted to keep on striking and to not sign up to bad contracts. But the GMB bureaucracy has failed to offer leadership at key points.

The British Gas strikers have the power to win this fight—but that means stopping the union leaders' hesitations and escalating the action.

## CIVIL SERVICE WORKERS

### Vote for strikes at DVLA

THOUSANDS OF workers at a major government workplace in Swansea have voted to strike against unsafe working conditions.

Workers at the massive Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) office voted by 72 percent to strike.

DVLA bosses have forced more than 2,000 of them to keep going into work, despite major outbreaks of coronavirus.

One worker and PCS union activist told Socialist Worker, "The management has said that this workplace is safe. We've had the biggest outbreak of Covid-19 in Britain—it's not safe."

"If management don't budge, then we will strike."

Conditions at the DVLA became headline news in January after it was revealed more than 500 people working there had caught coronavirus. Workers

complained they had been made to sit just one metre apart and that cleaning in the office was inadequate.

Yet bosses refused to allow more of them to work from home.

A worker said, "People felt like they weren't being taken seriously."

"Management said it was fine, but they've also started removing hundreds of desks—so which one is it?"

They explained that anger at the bosses encouraged workers to join the union and push for a ballot.

"There are a lot of people who have become reps and advocates in the union and that's because of the experience of the last 12 months," they said.

"We realised we can only rely on ourselves organising to change anything."

The PCS shouldn't delay in announcing dates for action.

## UNITE UNION ROUND-UP

**AROUND 1,000 workers** at the Royal Navy bases at Faslane and Coulport on the Clyde, in Scotland, struck last week over pay and bargaining rights.

Those taking action included electricians, mechanical fitters, plumbers and joiners who work for contractor Babcock Marine.

Unite union members at the company voted by 95 percent in support of strikes on a 65 percent turnout.

More action is planned.

**WORKERS AT aerospace parts firm SPS Technologies** in Leicester are striking over fire and rehire cuts that will cost them up to £3,000 a year.

Around 200 Unite union members face reductions to overtime pay, sick pay, paid breaks, and other terms and conditions if the fire and

rehire goes ahead. Unite said 24-hour strikes will take place on 19, 22 and 26 March, and workers were out last Friday on the first strike day.

Unite regional officer Lakhy Mahal added, "It is shameful that SPS is using this terrible virus as an opportunity to attack workers' terms and conditions."

"SPS's leadership should realise that this dispute will continue to escalate until an offer is put forward that our members can accept."

**BANK WORKERS** at Communis in Edinburgh have voted for strikes over a pay freeze and the closure of a pension scheme.

Around 25 Unite union members voted for action by 75 percent on a 91 percent turnout.

Strikes are set for 6, 12 and 19 April.

## CONSTRUCTION



Protest at Balfour Beatty Bailey's offices

PICTURE: GUY SMALLMAN

### Protests over deskilling

THE CAMPAIGN against deskilling in construction saw protests continue last week.

Balfour Beatty Bailey's offices were targeted this time.

The training of new grades at the Hinkley Point nuclear site has

apparently been put on hold. But bosses at Balfour Beatty Bailey have yet to withdraw the plans to introduce new deskilled grades to the industry.

Activists were this week expected to begin protests directly at sites to increase the pressure.

## HEALTH WORKERS

### Battles in the NHS

PORTERS, cleaners, switchboard and catering workers at Cumberland infirmary plan another three strike days in their long-running dispute over unsocial hours payments.

The 150 workers are employed by NHS subcontractor Mitie and struck earlier this month with Unison and GMB members picketing together.

They are set to strike again on 26 March.

●Messages of support to [enquiries@unisoncumbria.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@unisoncumbria.co.uk)

**PORTERS AT Heartlands hospital** in Birmingham are continuing their long-running fight against new contracts and rotas forced upon them.

The Unison union members are also preparing to strike on 26 March.

●Go to [facebook.com/unisonheartlandsporters](https://facebook.com/unisonheartlandsporters) for more details

## TELECOM

### National jobs ballot in BT

BT WORKERS could be moving towards their first national strike since 1987 over planned job cuts and site closures.

The CWU union, which has 45,000 BT Group members, is preparing a strike ballot.

It covers workers at BT, EE and Openreach, which controls most of Britain's broadband network.

They have great power at a time when millions of people are working from home.

CWU general secretary Dave Ward said, "It's quite clear management plans compulsory redundancies, an attack on terms and conditions and carrying out site closures without any consultation."

Meanwhile in a separate dispute 170 Openreach engineers were set to begin a five-day strike this Thursday as part of their long-running battle over regrading.

## SCOTTISH COLLEGES

### Keep up the pressure in FE

FROM SHETLAND to the Borders, Scottish Further Education lecturers in the EIS union are in dispute.

Some college managements are replacing them with instructors who do the same job on inferior terms.

Lengthy national negotiations have now produced a joint statement which is seen as an important step forward.

For the first time it identifies clearly what the lecturer role is. It recognises that teaching in Scotland's colleges is carried out only by lecturers.

To allow ratification by both sides, a first strike day planned for this week was suspended.

However, arrangements

for implementation are yet to be formulated. So strikes will commence on 25 March if this is not sorted out.

Meanwhile at Forth Valley College, where fire and re-hire was used to drive lecturers on to instructor contracts, strikes began this week.

The progress made so far in the dispute has depended on solidarity and militancy.

Management refused even to talk until an indicative ballot showed a huge majority for action, on a large turnout.

A statutory ballot with 90 percent for walkouts followed.

The joint statement was only agreed when it was hours away from the first strike going ahead.



## JOIN DAY OF ACTION —SAY NO TO RACISM

by ISABEL RINGROSE

**ANTI-RACISTS** worldwide are preparing to mobilise in street protests and online rallies this Saturday.

In Britain, Stand Up to Racism (SUTR) is calling for action against racism, Islamophobia, antisemitism and the rise of the far right.

Groups will be taking the knee. And online events will be held, including a major online rally.

Despite a government ban on protests, it is vital that activists are out on the streets.

SUTR co-convenor Weyman Bennett told Socialist Worker, "Protesting against racism, sexism and for LGBT+ rights is under attack. All our rights have been won by protest and organising."

### Democratic

"The police intend to continue to stop protests after the pandemic. We must fight those who are trying to destroy our democratic rights."

There are many issues to fight over. So far this year two black men in South Wales, Mohamud Hassan



IT'S IMPORTANT to protest against racism, especially during the pandemic

PICTURE: GUY SMALLMAN

and Moyied Bashir, have died after contact with police.

Black people are disproportionately killed by cops and are five times more likely to have force used on them.

Their deaths have reignited calls for justice. But following protests over the men's deaths, activists have been arrested and fined.

One Muslim man said he was dragged from his bed by

six plain-clothed South Wales Police officers and arrested—for shining a torch at a cop.

The man said he was handcuffed and hit in the back of a van.

Protest organiser Bianca

Ali has to pay a £500 fine or request a court hearing under coronavirus laws.

But she told Socialist Worker, "They will never keep me quiet, I will always speak out against injustice."

Weyman said, "We owe it to those people whose voices have been destroyed by racism to show our support on Saturday."

"We have the chant 'Whose streets? Our streets' because they do belong to us. As long as there is no justice there will be no peace."

### Refugees

Following the horrific treatment of refugees by the Home Office it is important to show resistance to the Tories' hostile environment.

An inspection of ex-army camps Napier Barracks in Kent and Penally camp, South Wales found "filthy" conditions. Hundreds were forced into the camps and left to catch the virus.

Refugees were left "depressed and hopeless". One said the Home Office "couldn't care less for the lives of vulnerable people".

Weyman said the international protests on Saturday 20 March will unite people and "show solidarity" between activists.

"Stand Up To Racism supports everyone who acts on Saturday," he added.

Find out more about 20 March at [standuptoracism.org.uk](http://standuptoracism.org.uk)

## Cops' failures and excessive force contributed to the death of Leon Briggs

AN INQUEST has found that failures and excessive force by police contributed to the death of Leon Briggs in November 2013.

The jury concluded last Friday the death was "contributed to by neglect".

Leon, a black man, was restrained by officers from Bedfordshire police with the "application of inappropriate use of force".

The jury also found that there was a "gross failure to provide Leon with basic medical attention".

On the day of his killing Leon was seen "moving erratically" in his local area.

Police were called out of concern for his welfare, but Leon was instead logged as "an aggressive male".

Armed officers arrived to detain him, with three forcing him to the ground on his front for over 13 minutes.

Despite the East of England Ambulance Service arriving on the scene, no assessment of his condition was made.

Leon was taken to Luton police station rather than to hospital.

He was dumped face down into a cell where he lay unresponsive and restrained for six minutes.

An ambulance



Leon Briggs died in 2013 after police left him face down in a cell

eventually took Leon to a hospital where he was pronounced dead.

An inquest decided he had died from "amphetamine intoxication" and from to being laid down on his front.

Jurors heard that Leon would have survived if he had been taken straight to hospital.

Leon's mother Margaret Briggs said, "The conclusion of neglect does not, I believe, reflect the evidence."

"I am disappointed the jury did not return a conclusion of unlawful killing."

"Over our long fight

for the truth there has been no remorse shown by the police."

Anita Sharma from Inquest lawyers, who represented Leon's family, said the police's actions "are part of a pattern of inhumane treatment rooted in systemic racism."

The police will say that seven years on things have changed," she added.

"Why then are black men still subject to disproportionate use of force by police?"

"Why are they more likely to die after police contact particularly when in a mental health crisis?"